REMARKS

Initially, in the Office Action dated April 7, 2004, the Examiner objects to claim 1 because informalities. Claims 1 and 4-10 have been rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over U.S. Patent No. 5,848,271 (Caruso et al.) in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,115,640 (Tarumi). Claims 2 and 3 have been rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Caruso et al. in view of Tarumi and further in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,334,133 (Thompson et al.).

By the present response, Applicants have canceled claim 2 without disclaimer and amended claim 1 with these limitations to further clarify the invention. Claims 1 and 3-10 remain pending in the present application.

Specification Objections

Claim 1 has been objected to because of informalities. Applicants have amended this claim to further clarify the invention and respectfully request that this objection be withdrawn.

35 U.S.C. §103 Rejections

Claims 1 and 4-10 have been rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Caruso et al. in view of Tarumi. Applicant shave discussed the deficiencies of Caruso et al. in Applicants' previously-filed response and reassert all arguments submitted in that response. Applicants respectfully traverse these rejections and provide the following additional remarks.

Tarumi discloses a workflow system that includes a workflow definition unit, a workflow operation/control unit, and a workflow estimation prediction unit. The

workflow system is capable of flexibly of meeting various requests such as advancement of a schedule or specification of a substitute and rearrangement in accordance with the intention of a definition designer.

Regarding claims 1, 9 and 10, Applicants reassert that Caruso et al. does not disclose or suggest the limitations in the combination of each of these claims of, inter alia, a user management table linked to management information of each of the users of the client terminals, for indicating a list of work items transferred to the user and information regarding a substitute user designated by the user in charge in association with each node operation, a controller for allowing according to the user management table, with respect to at least one work item, both a user in charge to whom the work item is transferred and a substitute user pre-designated by the user in charge to access the work item, and directly or indirectly transferring the work item processed by either user to the next user in charge according to the process management table, where the substitute user specifies the user in charge to access the work item, or requesting from one of the client terminals to the workflow server to display a work item to be performed by a substitute user by specifying a user in charge who designated the substitute user to process a work item, or selecting by the workflow server an unprocessed work item which can be processed by a user of a request source client terminal as the substitute user among unprocessed work items of the user in charge, or means for displaying, in response to a request from any requesting client terminal, a list of users who are designating the user of the

requesting client terminal as a substitute user on the client terminal, wherein the substitute user specifies the user in charge by referring to the list of users.

The Examiner asserts that Caruso et al. discloses at Figs. 11A, 11B, element 1140, a user management table as recited in the claims of the present application. However, these figures merely show examples of tables used to implement the Caruso et al. invention where element 1140 is one of the tables denoting a message queue containing next activity/task information. This is not a user management table linked to management information of each of the users of the client terminals, for indicating a list of work items transferred to the user and information regarding a substitute user designated by the user in charge in association with each node operation, as recited in the claims of the present application. These tables do not disclose or suggest information regarding a substitute user designated by the user in charge.

The Examiner further asserts that Caruso et al. discloses a controller as recited in the claims of the present application, at Fig. 16H, col. 11, lines 34-38, col. 13, line 18, and col. 15, lines 24-32. However, as pointed out in Applicants' previously-filed response, the cited portions of Caruso et al. merely disclose a computer screen displaying a To Do List conveying a plurality of next activity categories, a description of Fig. 6 showing what a next step may include, that a next activity/task category is added to another user's or work group's To Do List and that a stored procedure accesses a user's security table to determine which user specific activities the user has security privileges. These portions of Caruso et al. do not

disclose or suggest a controller allowing according to a user management table, <u>both a user in charge to whom the work item is transferred and a substitute user predesignated by the user in charge to access the work item</u>, or where the <u>substitute user specifies the user in charge by referring to a list of users</u>. The Examiner states that in Caruso et al. any member of a work group may access an item as a user in charge. This teaches away from the limitations in the claims of the present application in that a substitute user designated by the user in charge both are designated as the users to whom the work item is transferred and that may access the work item.

According to the present invention, even though the work item is transferred to the user in charge (or one of a group of users belonging to a "role"), the substitute user is allowed to process the work item if he or she has been designated by the user in charge as a substitute user for the work item. Thus, the substitute user is allowed to access work items having been assigned to other persons according to a workflow process. Moreover, information regarding the substitute user is previously linked to a user management table in association with each node operation. Caruso et al., as noted in Applicants previously-filed response, relates to the background of the present invention. Caruso et al. discloses assigning a work item to a specific user of the work group members so that two or more members may not process the same work item simultaneously. Caruso et al. discloses that once the message is added to the To Do List 240 for the user/group of users, the next activity/task 250 may be selected, viewed, and acted upon by the user associated

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with the To Do List 240 (see col. 11, lines 50-55). Caruso et al. does not disclose or suggest processing the work item by a substitute user, as recited in the claims of the present application.

The Examiner admits that Caruso et al. does not disclose or suggest where a first user is a user in charge and a second user is specifically pre-designated substitute user, but asserts that these limitations are disclosed in Tarumi at col. 6, lines 9-10 and col. 13, lines 10-15. However, these portions of Tarumi merely disclose that generating workflow definition may be based on various conditions such as the name of a worker in charge, descriptions of an algorithm where a portion <alt> asks a substitute for a task corresponding to the node when a problem has occurred at a node and that the substitute may be specified by the parameter <:to > or may be defined beforehand in the workflow definition. This is not information regarding a substitute user designated by a user in charge in association with each node operation, as recited in the claims of the present application. The mere fact that Tarumi discloses a term "worker in charge" or portions of an algorithm that relate to a term "substitute" does not disclose or suggest anything related to a substitute user (a real entity) designated by a user in charge (another real entity) in association with each node operation, as recited in the claims of the present application.

Moreover, Tarumi discloses to rearrange a workflow according to the progress of the work (see col. 10, lines 53-58) when it is predicted that the workflow operation does not run normally while keeping the deadline or it is difficult to keep the deadline. A rearrangement algorithm is disclosed to ask a substitute for a task corresponding

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to a node when a problem has occurred at the node (see col. 13, lines 10-27). This algorithm <alt> becomes a failure when no substitute is defined and the substitute refuses the request, therefore, Tarumi designates the substitute after a problem node has been detected. Tarumi further discloses that if a substitute accepts the task corresponding to the problem node, the work item (task) should be transferred to the substitute in accordance with the rearranged workflow process. Therefore, the substitute has to act as a new user in charge and it becomes impossible for the previous user in charge to access the work item assigned to the substitute. This teaches away from the limitations in the claims of the present application that allow both a user in charge and a substitute user to access a work item.

In the §103 rejections portions of the Office Action, the Examiner admits that Caruso et al. and Tarumi do not disclose or suggest means for displaying, in response to a request from any requesting client terminal, a list of users who are designated the user of the requesting client terminal, as a substitute on the client terminal, wherein the substitute user specifies the user in charge by referring to the list of users, but asserts that these limitations in the claims of the present application are disclosed in Thompson et al. in Fig. 12. However, this portion of Thompson et al. merely discloses a representation of example generated reports that includes an absentee report (with information on why a substitute worker was absent), a substitute assignment report (with information on a school assignment of the substitute worker), a call history report (with information on telephone calls made to the substitute worker) and an unfulfilled substitute assignment report (with

information regarding any vacancy that could not be filled). This is not displaying, in response to a request from any requesting client, a list of users who are designating the user of the requesting client terminal as a substitute user on the client terminal, where the substitute user specifies the user in charge by referring to the list of users, as recited in the claims of the present application. These portions of Thompson et al. merely disclose reports about an individual substitute worker, or an unfulfilled substitute worker position. These portions of Thompson et al. do not disclose or suggest anything related to displaying a list of users who are designating the user of the requesting terminal as a substitute user in response to a request from any requesting client terminal, or a substitute user specifying the user in charge by referring to the list of users. Thompson et al. merely relates to a system that identifies potential replacements for absent workers, and Fig. 12 merely discloses details on a potential substitute worker.

Regarding claims 4-8, Applicants submit that these claims are dependent on independent claim 1 and, therefore, are patentable over the cited references at least for the same reasons noted regarding this independent claim. For example, none of the cited references disclose or suggest a user management table that includes identification information of a substitute user designated for each process by the user in charge in association with identification information of each of the users of the client terminals.

Accordingly, Applicants submit that neither Caruso et al. nor Tarumi, taken alone or in any proper combination, disclose, suggest or render obvious the

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limitations in the combination of each of claims 1 and 4-10 of the present application. Applicants respectfully request that these rejections be withdrawn and that these claims be allowed.

35 U.S.C. §103 Rejections

Claims 2 and 3 have been rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Caruso et al. in view of Tarumi and Thompson et al. Applicants respectfully traverse these rejections. Claim 2 has been canceled. Thompson et al. was discussed above and in Applicants previously-filed response.

Applicants submit that claim 3 is dependent on independent claim 1 and, therefore, is patentable at least for the same reasons noted previously regarding this independent claim. Applicants submit that Thompson et al. does not overcome the substantial defects noted previously regarding Caruso et al. and Tarumi. For example, none of the cited references disclose or suggest when any user of the client terminals specifies a user serving as the user in charge and requests display of a work item to be performed by the user of the client terminal as a substitute user, said controller checks qualifications of the user of the request source client terminal for a substitute user by referring to the user management table corresponding to the user in charge and specifies work items to be displayed for the substitute user

Accordingly, Applicants submit that none of the cited references, taken alone or in any proper combination, disclose, suggest or render obvious the limitations in the combination of claim 3 of the present application. Applicants respectfully request that this rejection be withdrawn and that this claim be allowed.

In view of the foregoing amendments and remarks, Applicants submit that claims 1 and 3-10 are now in condition for allowance. Accordingly, early allowance of such claims is respectfully requested.

To the extent necessary, Applicants petition for an extension of time under 37 CFR 1.136. Please charge any shortage in fees due in connection with the filing of this paper, including extension of time fees, or credit any overpayment of fees, to the deposit account of Antonelli, Terry, Stout & Kraus, LLP, Deposit Account No. 01-2135 (referencing attorney docket no. 520.38267X00).

Respectfully submitted,

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